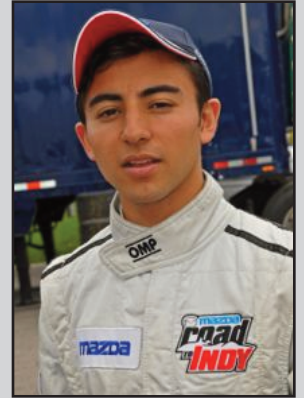


NEWS from TEAM

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Andrés Méndez represented Team GDT at Barber Motorsports Park.
(Joe Jennings photos)

Team GDT's Méndez Finishes 14th and 17th In Busy Day at Barber Motorsports Park

LEEDS, Ala., April 3 — Team GDT's Andrés Méndez posted a 14th and a 17th-place finish in twin 30-minute races for the Star Mazda Championship presented by Goodyear Sunday at Barber Motorsports Park, but that 17th could have easily been several positions higher with a little better luck during a wild shootout at the end.

The first half of the doubleheader originally scheduled for Friday was

postponed until Sunday afternoon due to rain. That made Sunday a marathon day for the second step of the Mazda Road to Indy, with races in both the morning and the afternoon on the 2.38-mile, 17-turn road course near Birmingham, Ala.

Méndez, 19, of Bogota, Columbia, is a rookie in the series. He drives the No. 53 which is sponsored by Datafile International SA and Grupo Kriterion.

It rained in qualifying on Friday afternoon too, and Méndez was 20th for the standing start on Sunday morning. A driver who was to start ahead of him, Jerimy Daniel, didn't start the race and when Méndez got the green flag he blasted off and passed both Walt Bowlin and Larry Pegram to move from 20th into 17th by the end of lap one.

He got another spot on the very next lap when Camilo Schmidt fell back,

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Photos may be downloaded off Team GDT's Facebook page.



and by lap three he was up to 15th when Zack Meyer also ran into difficulties.

Méndez was in 15th position, running between Carlos Linares and Pegram, when he set his fastest lap of the race on lap four with a 1:24.577. Two laps later he advanced to 14th when both he and Linares passed Zach Veach.

At the halfway point he was 2.524 seconds behind Linares with Veach applying a great deal of pressure, as Veach was only 0.405 of a second behind him. Méndez was able to fight off Veach and lengthen his advantage, however, and he was 4.57 seconds ahead of Veach when he took the checkered flag in 14th place with 21 laps complete. He actually passed more cars than the winner did, as Jack Hawksworth led every lap from the pole.

Méndez started 17th in Sunday afternoon's race, which started while the post-race interviews were still being conducted for the IZOD IndyCar Series' headliner. The grid for Sunday afternoon's race was set by each driver's fastest race lap Sunday morning.

This time his standing start didn't go as well as he hoped, as he slipped from 17th to 19th. He was running faster than the two drivers immediately in front of him, however.

Meyer dropped from 11th to the rear on lap seven, so Méndez got one spot at that point. As the race ap-

proached the halfway point Méndez was only 0.219 of a second behind the driver in 17th position, Pegram. A few turns later he passed Pegram for 17th with 10 laps down and 15 minutes to go. He then set his sights on the driver in 16th, Daniel, but the field had gotten spread out by then and Daniel was more than 6 seconds ahead of him.

Méndez didn't give up. He ran consistently fast laps while chasing down Daniel, setting his fastest lap of the race on lap 15 with a 1:24.406. That was faster than the fastest race lap of the driver who went on to finish tenth.

Méndez got 16th overall with 6 minutes remaining when Bruno Palli fell back, and the field closed up when the doubleheader's first full-course caution waved shortly thereafter. He was in 16th place, running behind Daniel and ahead of Pegram, when the green came out with just 1 minute remaining in the race.

That's when things really got crazy. Méndez moved up to 15th when Sage Karam got hit and dropped back. He was running in a tight pack and had advanced to about 13th place when he made contact with Linares in the next-to-last turn, which allowed Pegram, Karam, Linares and Daniel to get by him and push him back to 17th at the checkered.

The races will be shown on the Velocity network at noon Eastern on Sunday, May 20. They will also be

shown on ESPN International. More information on the series is located at StarMazda.com.

The next two races are on ovals, with the Night Before the 500 show at Lucas Oil Raceway in Clermont, Ind. next on the schedule May 26. Méndez has never raced on an oval track, and he's looking forward to testing there on May 5.

Fans can learn more about Team GDT on its Facebook page or through Twitter @TeamGDT.

Driver quotes follow: **Andrés Méndez:** "The first race was good. I started P20. I had a good standing start and passed some guys, and then I passed some others and finished P14.

"In the second race I was P15 after some laps and on the restart I passed Jerimy Daniel in Turn 5 on the last lap. Then I tried to pass some drivers in the last two corners but I had a little hit with Carlos Linares. He was in front of me, and I was trying to pass him. I did a half spin off the track but I got back on again and I finished P17.

"The track conditions weren't good in the second race because of all the rubber on the track from the IndyCar race. It gave our car some understeer.

"I got more experience driving the car and learning how to race in this series. I really want to thank Team GDT and my sponsors."